

Cross Burning Suspect Arraigned, Released

By KEITH L. MARTIN

Gregory Cerne had a birthday he will not soon forget.

Cerne spent his 20th birthday last Wednesday being arraigned in Plymouth District Court, one day after being arrested as the main suspect for leaving a burning cross at Holy Family Church.

Duxbury Police Chief Mark DeLuca said Cerne confessed on Tuesday to what the department is deeming a hate crime and was taken to the Plymouth House of Corrections, where he spent the early hours of his birthday.

In court on Wednesday, Cerne entered not guilty pleas to charges of arson, destruction of property over \$250 and property damage to intimidate. The charges could result in nearly 10 years in state prison.



Gregory Cerne, 20, was released to his parents on Wednesday, following his arraignment in Plymouth District Court on charges including arson and property damage to intimidate.

Prosecutor Maryclaire Flynn of the Plymouth County District Attorney's Office told the court that two anonymous individuals came to the police station on Tuesday and said they had been at Cerne's home when the crosses were built. The informants said they did not know of the plan to bring them to the church and light them on fire, she said.

At his appearance at the police station later that day, Flynn said Cerne made a videotaped statement to police that he and some friends had been drinking at his Bayridge Lane home and decided to make the crosses. Cerne then allegedly told police that he was drunk and he alone brought the cross to the church and used gasoline to light it on fire on Monday morning, said Flynn.

"He did not intend to burn down the church," said Flynn. "He went home to his friends and told them he had gone to the church and burned a cross."

Flynn named two other men in connection with mak-

ing the crosses, but no charges have yet to be filed by Duxbury police. She added that Cerne had no knowledge of a second unburned cross left in the front yard of an Oakwood Road home also discovered on Monday.

Given "the serious nature" of the crime, Flynn asked for \$5,000 bail.

Cerne's attorney, Colleen Carroll said that her client is enrolled in Quincy College, works part-time in Duxbury and has strong bonds to the community. She added that he willingly went to the police station when asked, thus he was not a flight risk. She suggested Cerne be released to his parents and their Duxbury home.

Judge Gregory Baler said that while Cerne's alleged crime was "an affront to many" and "by definition, reprehensible," that he could be released to his parents under

the conditions he report to probation once a week, abstain from drugs and alcohol and follow an 8 p.m. curfew.

Baler also granted the county's request for a stay away order for the church, but said if religious leaders at Holy Family allowed Cerne to return, he would vacate the order.

He also warned Cerne that if he was charged with any new criminal offenses, that the conditions of his release would be revoked and he would be held without bail for 60 days.

Cerne left the court a short time later with his parents, who had no comment.

When asked if she was happy with Wednesday's outcome, Carroll said she was as it was "appropriate for the circumstances."

Cerne is due back in Plymouth District Court on March 24.